

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 CU-02 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04

SIL-01 /083 W

-----191135Z 009327 /10

P 191022Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6120

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1879

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PINS TS

SUBJECT: GOT ARRESTS BEN SALAH ASSOCIATES

1. OVER PAST TWO WEEKS GOT SECURITY FORCES HAVE ARRESTED UP TO 30 PERSONS WHO WERE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH AHMED BEN SALAH IN 1960S OR ARE PRESENTLY ADVOCATES OF HIS POLICIES. AMONG THOSE ARRESTED ARE BRAHIM HAYDER AND ABDERRAZAK EL KEFI, BOTH OF WHOM SERVED BEN SALAH AS CHEF DE CABINET (SENIOR STAFF AIDE). OTHERS ARRESTED ARE MOHAMED BELHAJ AMOR, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE BENGINEERS' UNION, ABDELMAJID GAHBICHE, DIRECTOR OF THE BOURGUIBA SCHOOL IN SOUSSE, AND MOUNIR KACHOUKH AND MOHAMED DAOUD, BOTH TEACHERS AND OFFICIALS OF TEACHERS' UNION. GOT HAS NOT PUBLICALLY ACKNOWLEDGED ARRESTS.

2. WE UNDERSTAND THAT SERIES OF ARRESTS BEGAN ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO WITH KACHOUKH WHO WAS PICKED UP WHILE HANDING OUT BEN SALAH TRACTS IN TUNIS. GOT APPARENTLY UNCOVERED PRO-BEN SALAH CELL AND BEGAN OTHER ARRESTS. PERSONS ARRESTED INCLUDE SOME FIGURES OF BEN SALAH PERIOD WHO WERE TRIED AND CONVICTED WITH HIM IN 1971 FOR VARIOUS CRIMES THEY ALLEGEDLY COMMITTED

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WHILE OCCUPYING GOT POTTS.

3. PUBLIC REACTION TO ARRESTS HAS BEEN GENERALLY SUBDUED. TEACHERS' UNION PROTESTED KACHOUKH AND DAOUD ARRESTS AND TRADE UNION WEEKLY ECH-CHAAB GAVE PROTEST LOW KEY PUBLICITY. ENGINEER'S UNION HELD LARGE PUBLIC MEETING IN TUNIS MARCH 18 TO DISCUSS MEMBERS' COMPLAINTS AGAINST GOT WAGE POLICIES

THAT AFFECT THEM. 800 ENGINEERS PRESENT, MOST OF THEM EMPLOYED BY GOT, COMPLAINED ABOUT INADEQUACIES OF WAGE POLICIES BUT THEY ALSO PASSED STRONGLY WORDED FIVE POINT DECLARATION PROTESTING ARREST OF BALHAJ AMOR, THE UNION'S SECRETARY GENERAL. DELCARATION "FIRMLY AND ENERGETICALLY" CONDEMNED HIS ARREST, DEMANDED HIS IMMEDIATE RELEASE, DENOUNCED VIOLATION OF THE "MOST ELEMENTAL" RIGHTS, CALLED FOR RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF MAN INCLUDING PRINCIPALLY FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION, AND CALLED AN "UNLIMITED STRIKE" UNTIL BALHAJ AMOR IS RELEASED AND THE ENGINEERS' "LEGITIMATE DEMANDS" ARE SATISFIED. PSD DAILY L'ACTION IGNORED ENGINEERS' MEETING, GOT CONTROLLED LA PRESSE REPORTED IT BUT NOTED THAT ENGINEERS HAD ONLY DISCUSSED BELHAJ AMOR'S ARREST. LE TEMPS GAVE FAIRLY COMPLETE ACCOUNT EXCEPT FOR STRIKE CALL.

4. GOT ARREST OF BEN SALAHISTS UNDERLINES THE REGIME'S ABHORRENCE OF THE FORMER ECONOMIC CZAR AND HIS POLICIES OF STATE CAPITALISM AND COLLECTIVIZATION. BEN SALAH'S PARIS BASED POPULAR UNITY MOVEMENT HAS BECOME MORE ACTIVE LATELY CIRCULATING TRACTS ATTACKING GOT AND PROPOSING A CONCRETE ACTION PROGRAM (SEE TUNIS A-26). THIS PROGRAM WAS GIVEN PUBLICITY IN MARCH 7 ISSUE OF AFRIQUE-ASIE. BEN SALAHISTS ALSO CIRCULATED TRACT RECENTLY ATTACKING GOVERNMENT'S ARMS PURCHASE POLICY WHICH THEY SAID HAD COMMITTED \$500 MILLION TO UNNEEDED "MIRAGES AND PHANTOMS."

5. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROMINENCE OF SEVERAL OF THE DETAINEES IS LIKELY TO MAKE THEIR ARREST A MAJOR ISSUE IP TUNISIAN POLITICAL CIRCLES. WHILE WE UNDERSTAND THE GOT MAY RELEASE SOME OF THE DETAINEES SOON, THEY COULD ALSO BE CHARGED WITH CRIMES  
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THAT WOULD NORMALLY BRING LONG PRISON TERMS.  
MULCAHY

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## Message Attributes

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